

Managing Stress in High Threat/Dangerous Work Environments

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Class Objectives

- At the end of this presentation participants will be able to do the following:
 - Identify various types of stress and their symptoms
 - Identify ways in which to reduce stress
 - Identify ways to cope with Critical Incident Stress.
 - Learn at least one relaxation technique

Working in War Zones

When starting a challenging work assignment in areas ravaged by war or the threat of hostilities, it is important to note that stress is present in all areas of your work. High threat areas have potential to expose everyone to traumatic, distressing sights, sounds and situations.

Personal Bias

- The majority of those assigned to Baghdad will adjust and be effective.
- The likelihood that any of you will develop PTSD is relatively low.
- Many staff will find the assignment to Baghdad very challenging but highly rewarding and worthwhile.

WARNING

You will NOT rise to the occasion,
you will sink to the level of your
preparation.

Motivational Issues

- ❑ Financial
- ❑ Unhappy in current assignment
- ❑ Patriotism
- ❑ Appeal of Crisis environment/adventure
- ❑ Career enhancement
- ❑ Told I had to go
- ❑ Don't have a clue

Issues That Could Determine Adjustment

- Settlement of Home Front Issues Prior to Departure
 - Child/Parent Issues
 - Marital Issues ie. trust, fidelity
 - Financial Planning
 - Roles and Responsibilities While Away
- Communication With Family While Away
 - How to maintain adequate communication while gone, especially with very young children.

Stress In Dangerous Work Environments

- Day-to-Day Stress
- Cumulative Stress
- Critical Event Stress

Review of Conditions in Baghdad

- Morale among DOS personnel appeared good
- People nonetheless were very stressed
- Morale may deteriorate over time under existing circumstances

Day to Day Stress in Baghdad

- Lack of Privacy
- Limited Options for Varied Leisure Activities (boredom)
- Unfamiliar Work Environment
- Threat of Critical Incidents
- Difficulty Obtaining Accurate and Current Information

Establishing a Comfort Zone

Everyone has their own comfort zone which will change over time once you acclimate to your environment.

The size of your comfort zone will depend on your ability to adapt physically, emotionally and mentally to your immediate situation.

Living Arrangements in Baghdad

- 3000 people attached to palace
- Many live in the palace
 - Ballroom ("Chapel")
 - Offices
 - Four person trailers
- Plumbing appeared unreliable
- Large number of Iraqis in the GZ

Ways to Address Stress

- Avoid the Stressor
- Change the Stressor
- Change Your View of the Stressor

How can I Reconcile being a
Sheep when I want to be a
Sheep Dog?

INOCULATION

- Identifying Internal and External Stressors by thinking like a SHEEP DOG
- Learn Relaxation Techniques
- Taking Care of Yourself
 - Eating well
 - Sleeping well
 - Create opportunities for yourself to relax

Red Flags

- Chronic Fatigue
- Feeling Indispensable/Unappreciated
- Difficulties Sleeping
- Difficulty Managing Emotions
Particularly Anger
- Negativity/Cynicism
- Abuse of alcohol

Traumatic Stress In Baghdad

- al-Rashid Hotel bombing (October 26)
- Mortars
- IEDs
- Ambushes/Hostage Taking
- Sniper attacks

Critical Incident Stress

Critical Incident

- Are sudden and unexpected
- Disrupt our sense of control
- Involve the perception of a life-damaging threat
- May involve emotional or physical loss

Critical Incident

- VIOLATES ASSUMPTION ABOUT HOW THE WORLD WORKS
- SHEEP TALK:
 - "Bad things will not happen to me"
 - "The world is predictable, fair, and controllable"
 - "bad things don't happen to good people"

Keep in Mind:

- Many Types of Situations can be Critical Incidents
 - A critical incident for me may not be critical for you.....It depends on our perception of vulnerability, control over the situation, and the personal meaning of the incident.

Critical Incident Stress Immediate Responses

- Person may initially be dazed, inattentive, confused—may last a few minutes-or a few days
- Stress comedown reactions:
Tremors/Shakes, Lightheaded, Rapid pulse, Confusion, Hyperventilation, Chills, Crying, Nausea, Sweats,

THE TRAUMA RESPONSE

SIGNS THAT I AM STUCK

COPING WITH CRITICAL INCIDENT STRESS

HOSTGAGE TAKING

- Though highly unlikely you will be taken hostage, there are strategies you can use that can save your life

Surviving Hostage Situations

- Do not lose hope and avoid an open display of despair
- Don't antagonize the hostage taker
 - The first hour is the most volatile
 - Initially don't speak unless spoken to
 - Do exactly as you are told—do not argue
 - Avoid making suggestions
 - Only make eye contact when being told what to do.

Surviving Hostage Situations

- Try to rest but remain facing your captor
- Be observant, but not conspicuously so, as you may be released
- Do not try to escape unless you are certain that you will be successful
- In case of rescue
 - Expect noise and lights
 - Hit the floor and stay there

COPING STRATEGIES

- Talk it out/Write it out
- Access Support System- Seek support, assistance, and help from others
- Maintain Routine/Structure- Provides sense of control and stability.

COPING SUGGESTIONS

- Strategies to lower arousal:
 - Rest
 - Deep relaxation/breathing exercises
 - Exercise
 - Try to eat as healthy as possible with limited choices
 - Access professional resources if necessary

Emotional Impact

- Usually hits within a couple of days. May continue several weeks or longer depending on the situation, coping skills, and the presence of support.

TRAUMA AND MEMORY

- The brain processes trauma differently than it does other memory. For some, the memory of events remain in the central nervous system loop and are available to our awareness resulting in ongoing stress reactions or PTSD.

RETURN ISSUES

- Close friends and family may respond to your experiences differently than expected.
- Be aware of how those you are returning to have changed. Take it slow.
- Be aware of your own delayed reactions.

CONCLUSIONS AND QUESTIONS